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Testimony for the Record in House FWP Hearing on Senate Bill 78 April 3, 2007

Chairman Milburn and Committee Members:

I fully support the present SB 78. I have lived at ground zero for river lock-up since 1990. I am a 5th generation MT native, former wildlife management and research biologist, cattle rancher, and present general outfitter, gift products manufacturer and wildlife consultant. I started the Jefferson River Watershed Council and served on it from 1999 till the end of 2006. I am also a director of Lewis and Clark Trout Unlimited and we have been very involved with river improvement and river access.

The river access problem heated up in Madison County about 1990 with the arrival of a couple of people who had worked together in Colorado. One arrived with considerable baggage including having been involved in the Silverado Savings and Loan scam. They knew the value to them of locking up rivers for fishing and land for hunting for wealthy out of state clients and also to wealthy people who would purchase ranch land at inflated prices if all others were locked out.

While they concentrated their actions on the Ruby River, one did not hesitate to try to lock-up up access to other rivers. The Silverado scam artist at one time claimed in national advertising to have 150 miles of private fishing water on our rivers in SW Montana. It was public water and most could be floated. He and a partner also attempted to block access to the entire Ruby Mountains range which is managed by the BLM. Local people fought this very hard and they were unsuccessful in locking up the mountain range.

Montana landowners used to avoid anglers--so they would just go fishing and not disrupt the ranchers' work with talk. The new owners from out of state, however, work hard at keeping the local people and others off the rivers. Things have gotten nasty with a cable strung across the Ruby River to harm boaters, barbed wire and electrified wire on bridges, shouting matches, physical threats, and several forms of intimidation for anglers including video cameras stuck in their faces. The latter has been a favorite tactic of some people on the Ruby River. The law making it illegal to harass anglers resulted from the PETA rock throwing incident on the Madison and from scam artist harassment activity on the Ruby. Of course there have been many continuing lawsuits as people from out of state try to rule Montana.

We have outstanding rivers. Let's end the scams and lawsuits and let people enjoy these rivers in peaceful settings with well designed, safe, livestock fences with gates at bridges. Please support the present version of SB 78 for our public bridges and water.